

Naturalist notebook.

11



Thames Science Center

**APRIL
1971**



NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

APRIL 1971

VOLUME VII

NO. 4

FRONT COVER

"FEMALE FLICKER AND YOUNG"

From the Audubon Wildlife Film Series. Be sure to attend the final film of the season this month.

CONTENTS

Nature Calendar	1
Heads Up!	4
Notes From Here and There....	6
From the Executive	
Director's Desk	7
Picture Puzzle to Color.....	8
April is for Amphibians	10
They're Not Weeds!	12
Growing Good Food	14
Field Notes.....	15

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

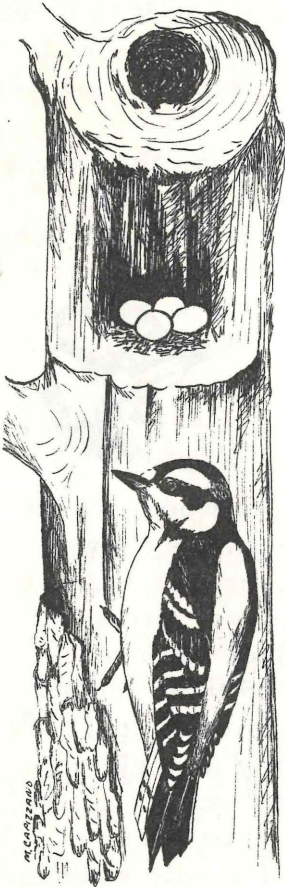
Mrs. Robert Anderson
Dr. George S. Avery
Mrs. William Boyd
Mrs. Hugh Costello
Dr. Robert DeSanto
Mr. Royce Gray
Dr. Marion H. Hamilton
Mrs. John Kashanski — Vice President
Dr. Edgar de N. Mayhew
Atty. Frank L. McGuire
Mrs. John Merrill — Secretary
Mr. J. Morgan Miner
Mrs. J.A. Michael Morse
Mrs. Elizabeth C. Noyes
Dr. William A. Niering
Dr. Gerard Rousseau
Dr. Russell Sergeant — President
Mr. Ralph A. Sturges III
Mrs. Robert Sullivan, Jr. — Treasurer
Atty. Robert Sussler
Mrs. Kenneth Talbot

CONSULTANT:

Dr. Richard H. Goodwin

APRIL

The Month Of Courting Woodpeckers



DOWNY WOODPECKER, ♂
AND NESTING CAVITY

The courtship and mating of woodpeckers is at its peak in April, and is a fascinating display to watch...and to hear! Woodpeckers are notorious for pounding their sharp beaks on the trunks of trees, resonating the sound of spring and the season for courtship. Most male woodpeckers will begin to peck a hole in a dead tree in order to lure a mate to a suitable nesting site, and in case that one hole doesn't meet thy fair lady's fancy, he begins other holes too! After a mate has been chosen, and the female has selected her favorite home, both male and female complete pecking their nesting cavity. The nesting cavity will be quite deep, from eight to ten inches for a Downy Woodpecker to over three feet deep for the giant Pileated Woodpecker. The actual nest usually consists of a bed of the wood chips left from the drilling, though pieces of bark and twigs are sometimes supplemented and are used almost entirely to furnish man-made nesting boxes and the nests of flickers.

The flicker is a large and fairly common bird that will usually nest in natural tree cavities rather than drill his own hole, and has quite successfully been lured to nest in man-made boxes. But whether the male flicker... distinguished from the female by his moustache!... decides to attract a mate to a natural tree cavity or a birdhouse, he also entices her by pounding with his beak. The louder the pounding the better, so flickers will often choose metal rather than wood... a rain spout, a T. V. antenna, a wheel barrow, a tin can... anything! Even after a mate has been chosen and the babies are hatched, a male flicker may continue his pounding.

The male Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers both have a red patch on the back of the head which the females lack, and it is this red patch that is dominantly displayed during courtship and mating. It has been observed that during copulation, a male Downy pecked at the female's head causing it to bleed slightly, quite by accident. When the male noticed the red spot, he confused his mate with an intruding male and pecked at her furiously until she escaped.

The Hairy Woodpecker is less common than the Downy, and though they are often confused, size is the greatest difference. The Hairy, $7\frac{1}{2}$ " long, is about two inches bigger than the Downy and its bill is longer and more slender. Two other differences are less conspicuous. The Hairy Woodpecker has a black line through the crown of his head. Also, the outer white tail feathers lack three little black spots which the Downy has.



The giant among the woodpeckers and the most uncommon is the crown-sized Pileated Woodpecker... a truly magnificent bird to observe. His head is crowned with a brilliant red crest, and his wing-spread of 25 to 30 inches reveals a conspicuous white stripe. The Pileated flies silently above the tree tops when he wants to cover great distances, but he can be seen and heard for more than half a mile when he hammers at a tree with his black, chisel beak. First listen, if you want to find a Pileated, and look for oval-shaped holes in tree trunks. The nesting site is usually 40 to 50 feet high, and this year's nest evidenced by half a bushel of wood chips on the ground! Pileated Woodpeckers are rare visitors on the coast, but a trek through Pachaug Forest or Devil's Hopyard will prove to be a rewarding April day when you find a Pileated.

M. M. C.

THE APRIL CALENDAR

APRIL IS THE MONTH OF BUDS AND FLOWERS

April 4...Semipalmated and Pectoral Sandpipers were sighted last year.

April 10...The full Pink Moon.

April 12...The first Chipping Sparrows arrive.

April 12...Barn Swallows can be seen soaring for the first time this spring.

April 13...Trailing Arbutus can be found blooming under leaves in the woods.

April 13...The last Tree Sparrows have left the area.

April 14...Tiny blue Spring Azures are flittering through the woods.

April 15...Purple Martins, the largest of the swallows, return from the South.

April 18...Bloodroot and Hepatica are in bloom.

April 24...Daylight Savings Time begins. Set clocks ahead one hour.

April 25...The first Black and White Warblers arrive.

April 25...American Toads and Marsh Marigold can be found.

April 26...Spotted Sandpipers and Chimney Swifts are in the area.

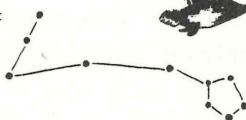
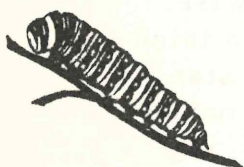
April 29...Purple Trillium is in bloom.

April 30...Arbor Day.

April 30...Jack-in-the-Pulpit is blooming.

April 30...More warblers arrive and can be found in thick woods: Magnolia, Hooded and Blue-winged.

April 30...Common Terns return to our shores.

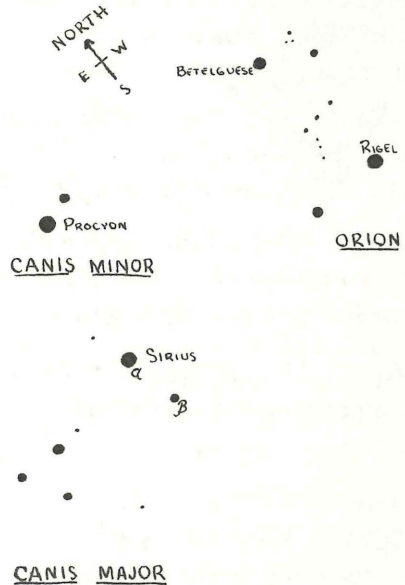


HEADS UP!

By Robert L. Dyer

Did you manage to find Orion and Canis Major last month? If not, you will still have some time in April, but you had better hurry because by the end of April, Orion will set shortly after sunset.

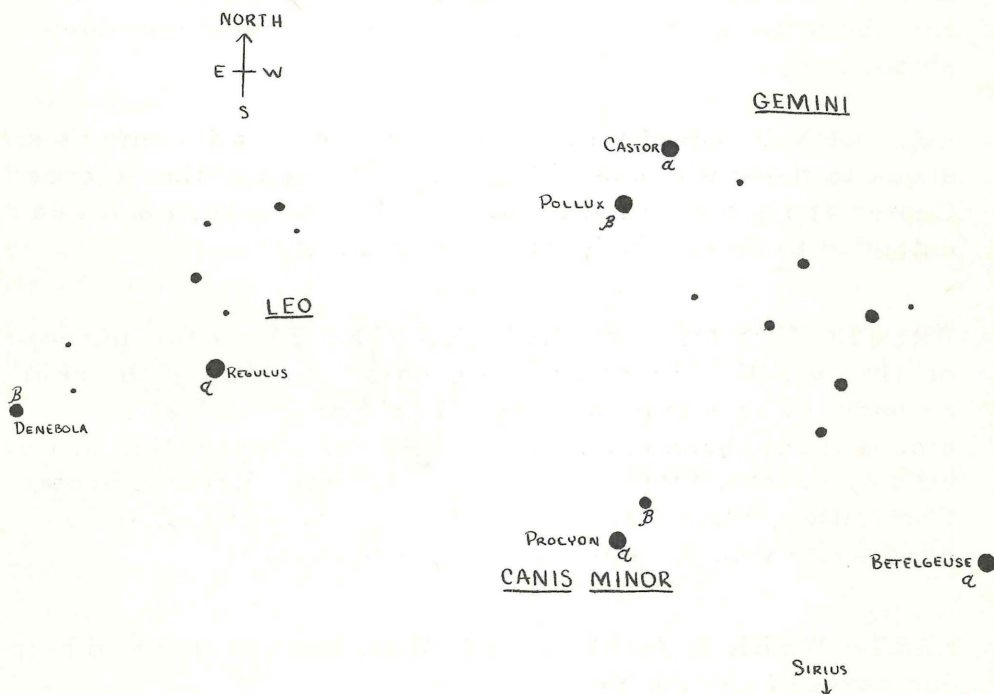
This month start once again with Orion and find Betelgeuse, the reddish, first magnitude star of Orion's right shoulder. From Betelgeuse proceed directly east, i. e. away from the sunset, a distance equal to one and one-half times the distance between Betelgeuse and Rigel and you will find a bright, white star, somewhat north-east of Sirius (see last month's newsletter). This star is called Procyon and is the brightest star of the constellation Canis Minor, the little dog. Canis Minor and Canis Major are supposed to be Orion's hunting dogs.

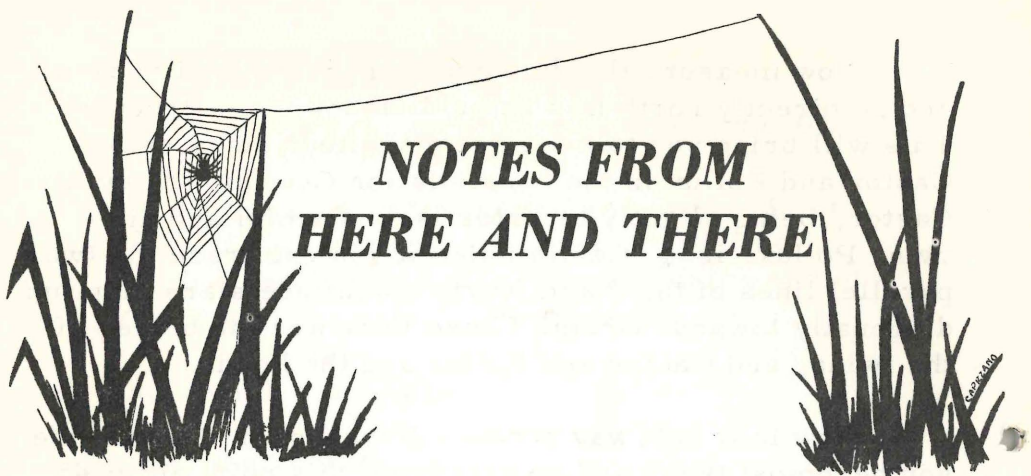


For convenience sake, astronomers designate the stars of each constellation by their brightnesses using the Greek alphabet. The brightest star of a constellation is designated as Alpha α , the next brightest Beta β , next Gamma γ , and so on. For example α Canis Major means the brightest star in the constellation of Canis Major, Sirius. Likewise, Procyon is α Canis Minor. β Canis Minor, a third magnitude star near Procyon is the only other star likely to be noticed in this constellation by the naked-eye observer.

Now measure the distance from Sirius to Procyon and go directly north this same distance from Procyon. This will bring you to two first magnitude stars called Castor and Pollux in the constellation Gemini, the twins. Castor, being slightly brighter is α Gemini and his twin, Pollux, is β Gemini. See if you can trace the two parallel lines of third and fourth magnitude stars that run diagonally towards Orion. These lines are the bodies of the twins, and Castor and Pollux are the heads.

Now look half way between Procyon and Pollux, the southernmost twin, and go east from this point about 45 degrees, and you will notice a large, sickle-shaped group of six stars with a bluish first magnitude star at its base. This star is α Leo or Regulus in Leo, the lion. Remember that 45 degrees is one-half the distance from the horizon to straight overhead when you try to locate Leo. Continuing east from Regulus, you will intersect a triangular group of stars, the brightest of which is called Denebola, β Leo. Good Hunting!





NATURE CENTER DIRECTORS OF CONNECTICUT: The Science Center will be host to the spring meeting of the state's nature center directors on Monday, April 19. The Center will be closed to the public on that day.

FRIENDS OF THE CENTER: Dr. and Mrs. Richard H. Goodwin and Dr. James M. Hollister have become Friends of the Thames Science Center. Mrs. Ellery Allyn, Mrs. Leon J. Bascom, Mrs. Priscilla M. Endicott and Miss Elizabeth H. Harris have renewed their Friend memberships.

DR. JOHN B. CHADWICK, whose sudden death came as a shock to those who knew him, was a Friend of the Science Center and a concerned conservationist. Our sympathy is extended to Mrs. Chadwick and her family.

PROTECTION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES is the purpose of House Bill 7739 which will prohibit the sale of the skin or body, of raw or manufactured animal skins that are among many threatened species. Please support this bill by writing Senator Stanley J. Pac, Chairman, Environmental Committee, State Capitol, Hartford, Connecticut, 06103. Also write your senators and representatives.

EARTH WEEK IS APRIL 19-25. What are you doing to help our ravaged environment?

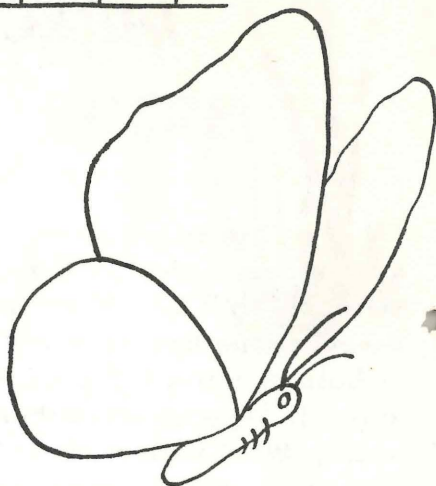
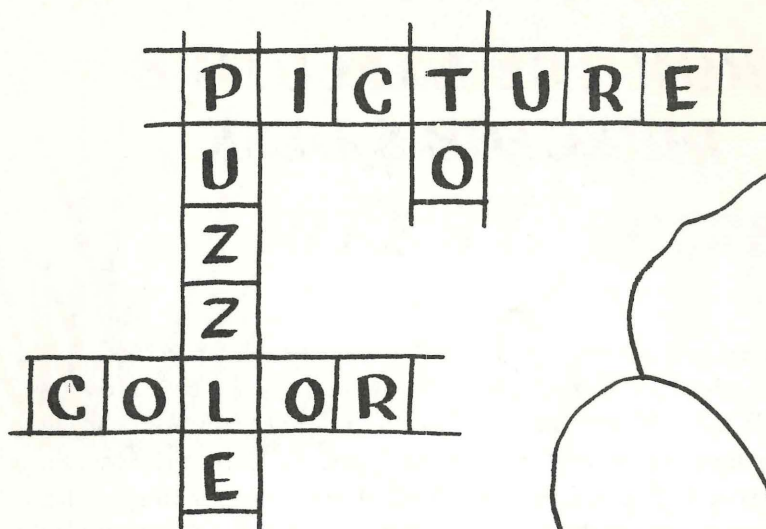
FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Robert S. Treat


"This trip opened up a whole new world for me," said a member of the Outing Club snowshoe trip in the New Hampshire White Mountains. Everyone has seen snow just as everyone has seen the ocean and yet as one discovers a "whole new world" underwater with fins and a mask, the same is true on snowshoes in a hardwood forest at the base of Mt. Washington. The Jackson trail was on top of three feet of snow and it was snowing on top of us. We "experienced" snow! Having set out at 8:30 a. m. we were overdressed and steaming although it was 19 above zero. As we moved higher and hit brutal winds at Halfway House, the chill factor entered, and we were glad to stop and eat our half frozen lunch. After a look through the misty clouds at Mt. Adams we headed back at an easy pace.

Saturday night we enjoyed a mountaineer's dinner at Pinkham Notch Camp where by chance the President of the Appalachian Mountain Club and other officers were having their annual meeting. We therefore watched a special skit by the staff and were later joined by John B. Nutter, Coordinator for Environmental Education at AMC. One of the side benefits of the trip was a letter from Mr. Nutter expressing interest in a joint AMC-TSC effort in environmental education in the North Country to study the ecology of the mountains. We are actively pursuing this exciting idea.

Sunday found us in the "silence" (Silence alone is worthy to be heard, "Thoreau once said) of a hemlock grove on the trail along a frozen brook to Carter Notch, and then the long ride back home with thoughts of future trips.

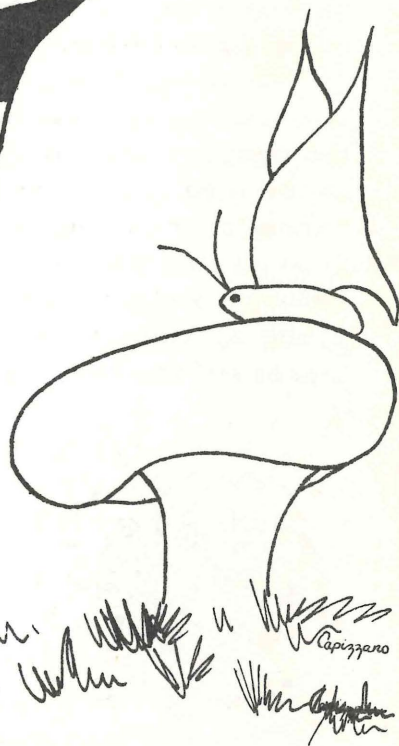
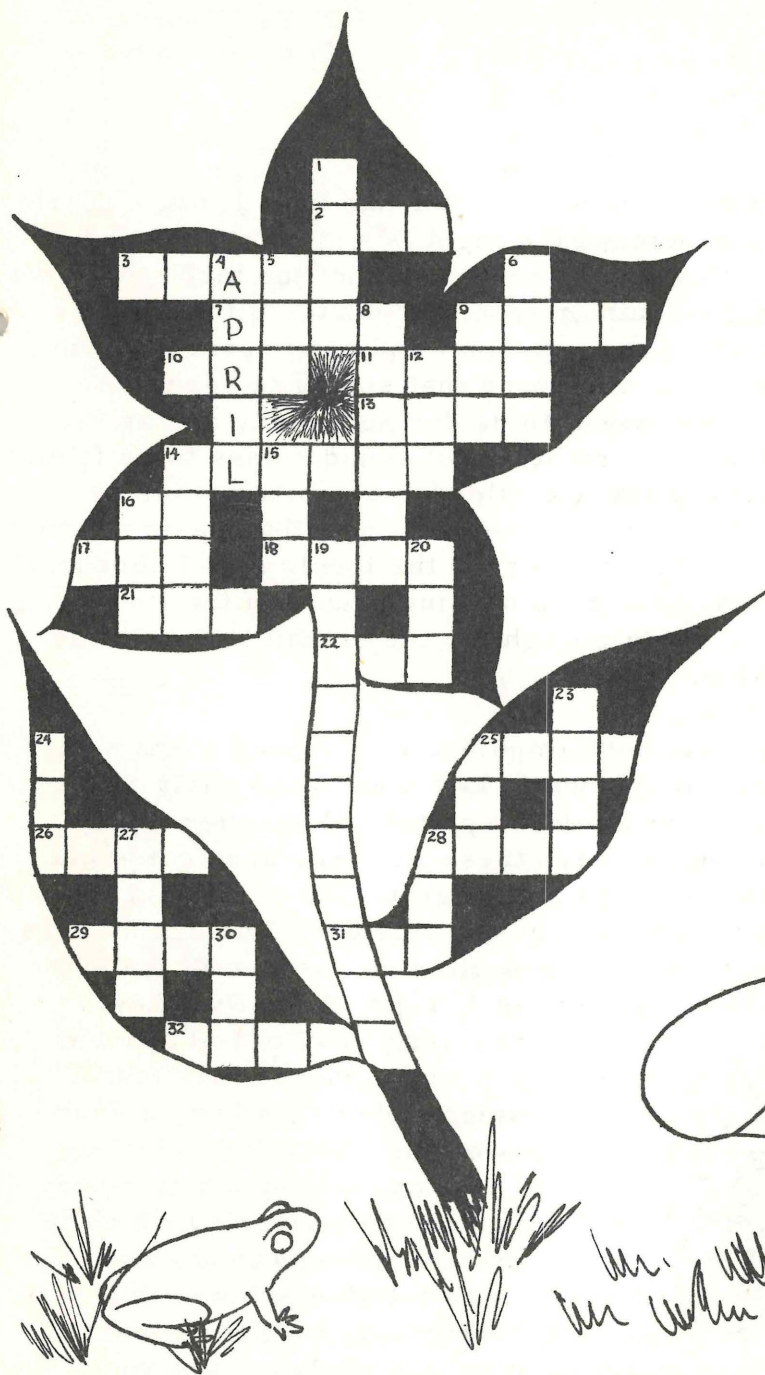


ACROSS

2. A SNAKELIKE FISH
3. MARINE ANIMALS WITH SHELLS AND PINCHERS.
7. FAVORITE ANIMALS KEPT IN CAPTIVITY.
9. LOW PLANT WITH MANY BRANCHES.
10. A METAL PRODUCING ROCK.
11. AN AMPHIBIAN FOUND ON LAND.
13. LARGE, MICE-LIKE RODENTS.
14. THE BLOSSOM OF A PLANT.
16. A PREPOSITION --- DIRECTION TOWARD.
17. A DAIRY ANIMAL.
18. BRANCH OF A TREE.
21. WHAT KIND OF A TREE? 
22. NUMBER OF LEGS ON AN INSECT.
25. KIND OF SHRUB --- ALSO A FISH!
26. A WATER BIRD.
28. A LACEY WOODLAND PLANT.
29. A FERTILE GARDEN SOIL.
31. A POISON, THREE-LEAVED PLANT.
32. A SMALL, SECRETIVE RODENT.

DOWN

1. A TROUBLESOME NUISANCE.
4. FOURTH MONTH.
5. INSECT THAT MAKES HONEY
6. TINY, UNDEVELOPED LEAF AT TIP OF TWIG.
8. A SMALL "RIVER."
9. A FLYING MAMMAL.
12. USED TO ROW A BOAT.
14. PERTAINING TO A BIRD USED FOR FOOD
15. NOCTURNAL BIRD.
16. PART OF A FOOT.
19. POISON USED TO KILL INSECTS.
20. KIND OF TURTLE THAT CAN CLOSE ITS SHELL.
23. BABY DEER.
24. AN INSECT THAT LIVES IN A COLONY.
25. FEMALE OF A SPECIES (PRONOUN)
27. PART OF A PLANT BELOW SOIL.
28. TO MOVE THROUGH THE AIR.
30. NOISE A COW MAKES.



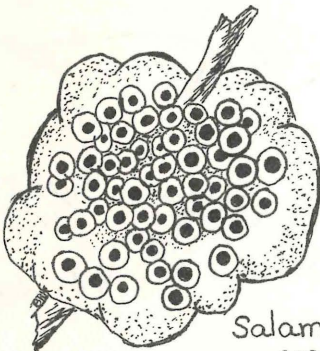
APRIL IS FOR AMPHIBIANS

*Text and Illustrations
By Barbara Kashanski*

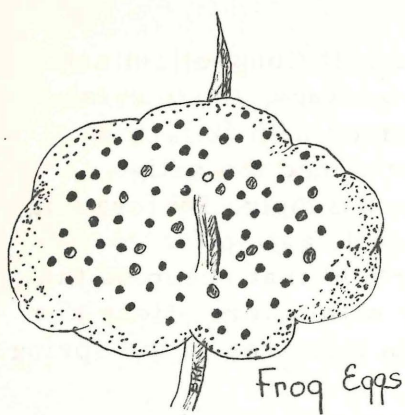
By April the silence of winter has been broken. Early each morning the quiet of the night is suddenly replaced by happy and sometimes very noisy songs of the birds that have returned from the South or from our winter birds such as the chickadee, titmouse, cardinal and song sparrow, who seem extra loud in proclaiming that spring is here. The sounds of the birds stay with us during the day and as the sun sets, a new and very beautiful sound comes to us from ponds, swamps and any area flooded by spring rains or melting snow. There can be no doubt now that warm weather is coming, for since late March, the lovely shrill chorus of spring peepers and the deep barking grunts of the wood frogs have told us it's warm enough for the amphibians to come out of hibernation.

One of the earliest amphibians to appear along with the peepers and wood frogs in late March and early April is the lovely black and yellow spotted salamander. Very rarely seen during the day, these shy creatures come out at night in great numbers and migrate into ponds and swamps to breed and lay their cloudy egg clusters. The egg masses of the spotted salamander are often confused with the egg masses of the wood and pickerel frogs. Actually, they

are quite easy to tell apart if you know what to look for. The salamander eggs have a double covering. Each individual egg is surrounded by a tiny cloudy gelatin-like covering which makes each egg look like a tiny whitish marble with a dark center. Then all the covered eggs are enclosed in a mass of jelly.

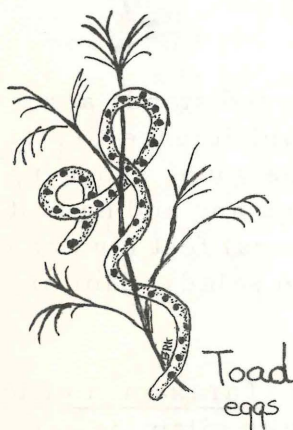


Salamander
eggs



The frog eggs are not individually covered, but are just round black dots in a big mass of jelly.

Another amphibian that is busy laying eggs in April and early May is our common American Toad. Toad's eggs are laid in two long, curly strings of jelly containing a single row of black eggs. One toad can lay from four to twelve THOUSAND eggs!



It's great fun to collect masses of frog or salamander eggs and put them in a jar to watch them hatch, but let's remember these things before you start collecting. The tadpoles that hatch from these eggs are a very important link in the food chains of ponds and streams. The adults that develop from the tadpoles are also an important source of food for many animals and birds. If each of us collects all the egg masses we find in a pond, or swamp or ditch, we will be taking away a very important source of food of many other

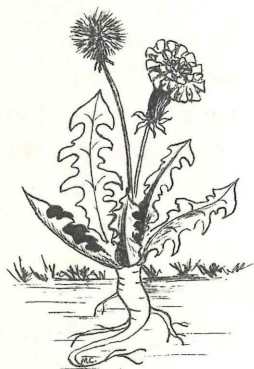
animals that we enjoy having around. We will be upsetting the balance of nature. So instead of taking all the eggs you find, just take one or two masses; watch them; learn from them, and enjoy the thought that next year you will probably find more in the same place because you didn't take all you could find this year.

THEY'RE NOT WEEDS!

By Stephan Syz

Before Europeans began to inhabit Connecticut and introduce techniques of modern agriculture, there existed a lush vegetation which, when combined with fish, meat and simple agricultural methods, provided the native Americans with more than ample food supply. By foraging for wild food you can not only gain satisfaction for yourself but also get insights into the delight that occupied the lives of those who lived in harmony with nature. Here are a few wild foods that are abundant in this area in the spring.

JAPANESE KNOTWEED (Polygonum cuspidatum) introduced from Japan, is superb as a fruit or vegetable. In early spring it sprouts from large, hollow, broken stalks of the previous year's growth. The old stalks have jointed stems that are swollen at the joints like bamboo and often remain standing through the winter. A good example of Japanese Knotweed stands across the street and slightly to the north of the old Science Center. A delicious vegetable can be made from the young shoot (up to about a foot) by boiling for 3 to 4 minutes and adding salt and butter. The young stalks of plants several feet high can be peeled of its rind, chopped, and used in salads, jam or as pie filling, like rhubarb.



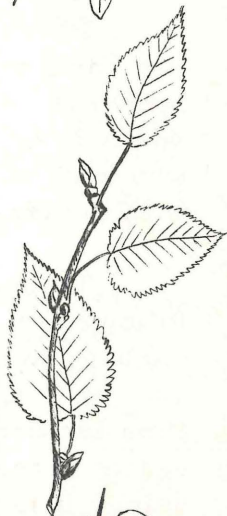
DANDELIONS (Taraxacum officianale) are loaded with vitamins and especially tasty if collected in early spring before they flower. (When flowering occurs the leaves acquire a bitter taste.) At this time the leaves are small reddish clusters, later spreading out and turning green. Dig up the plant, roots and all, cut off the leaves, wash, pour boiling water over them and boil for 5 minutes.

Season and butter, and you have an excellent vegetable. The young leaves can also be eaten as a salad. In your digging, you will discover that dandelion leaves start to grow at the top of the root a few inches below the surface. The base of the leaves below the surface is white and called the crown. Cut off the leaf tops, then cut just below where the leaves attach to the tip of the roots. This portion of the plant can either be eaten raw or cooked as described above.

Although the Knotweed and Dandelion are abundant along roadsides, it is always safer in collecting plants for eating to avoid those next to roads. Car exhaust accumulates lead on the plants and in the soil, and there is also the possibility that an insecticide or weed killer has been used.

TEAS also abound in our woods in almost limitless variety. SASSAFRAS tea can be made by collecting young roots of the Sassafras, cutting them up and boiling them until the water turns a deep red. A wintergreen tea can be made in the spring by cutting up young twigs, leaves, roots or inner bark of the BLACK BIRCH and steeping them in boiling water for 5 minutes.

Try some of these familiar, easy to locate, wild foods as a start. As you gain experience you may want to buy one of the numerous good books on the subject. You will discover that many other plants with which you are already probably familiar, like the DAY LILY, the BRACKEN FERN fiddle head that begins to curl up through the ground in spring, the MILKWEED and hundreds of others make excellent eating and are great opportunities to experiment in the culinary arts.



GROWING GOOD FOOD

By Martha Capizzano

Part of growing healthy flowers and good food is beginning with a nourishing soil. A compost pit in your backyard will be an excellent source for such nourishment, and it is an absolute must for ecologically-minded individuals who wish to recycle their garbage rather than throw it out with the trash.

To build a compost pit, several procedures can be followed, but the easiest method is simply to pile all the garbage in one spot on a remote section of your property and let it rot. This, however, requires a great deal of time for decomposition to be completed, and such a pile is easily accessible to dogs, cats, raccoons and other animals unless it is surrounded and covered with a fencing material.

The following method is recommended to yield a safe and fairly fast method of preparing compost. Dig a hole in the ground at least four by four feet square and at least two feet deep. Line the sides of the hole with cinder blocks and above the ground level one or two feet. A hardware cloth or wire covering secured on a durable frame will protect the pile from scavengers.

Add any organic material to the pit as it becomes available...table left-overs, weeds, grass cuttings, small sticks, etc. Toss and mix the material once every week or two, and keep it moist by spraying it with a hose should rain be scarce. To keep the mixture from becoming too acidic and to hasten decomposition, add a thin layer of lime once a month and mix it thoroughly into the pile.

If you begin a compost pile now, you may have a good supply of fertilizer for fall planting, bulbs, winter house plants, and perennials. Next spring, add a good supply of compost to your garden and be assured that your plants will be well nourished.

FIELD NOTES

Mystic, Stonington: On Mar. 28, 29 BRANT were sighted between Sandy Point and Stonington. At the Peace Sanctuary, WOODCOCK were courting on Mar. 8, and the first KESTREL in that area was seen on Mar. 5. Up to 41 CANVASBACKS have been on the Mystic River for the past two weeks. Along the shore in Stonington, a male EVENING GROSBEAK, an unusual winter visitor on the coast this year, was at a feeder on Mar. 4 and was joined by a female on Mar. 5.

Waterford, New London, Lyme: A GREY FOX was a regular nocturnal visitor at a house on Wayhill Road in Waterford in mid-February. An immature BALD EAGLE was seen on the Lieutenant River on Feb. 16 and on Feb. 19, a RUDDY DUCK was sighted in Jordan Cove. On the 21st of Feb. 13 BRANT were at Magonk Point and 25 were there again on Mar. 3. WOODCOCK were seen in the early evening on Feb. 28 at Magonk Point, but the first courting of 2 pairs occurred on Mar. 5 and one pair performed on the 6th. A RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER has resided in Old Lyme for over a year (!!!) and a pair was sighted at the same spot on Mar. 10. Two BARRED OWLS were in a pine grove on private property near Harkness on March 2. On March 7, following a severe windstorm, two nearly matured owl eggs were discovered broken on the ground below what was believed to be a BARRED OWL's nest. SNOWDROPS were blooming on New Shore Road on Mar. 1. Over two dozen PURPLE FINCHES were feeding and calling at Rocky Neck on Mar. 7.

Rhode Island Shoreline: On Feb. 21, a SHORT-EARED OWL was at Napatree Point. A "RARE BIRD ALERT" revealed a BARROW'S GOLDENEYE on the west end of Charleston Pond on Mar. 7.

Contributors to this column were: Grace Bissell, Miss Bina Blanchette, Martha Capizzano, Mrs. Charles Crowell, Tony DeGange, Bob Dyer, and the Rhode Island Birding Club.

NEW LONDON COUNTY BIRD CLUB

Spring Trips

- April 10 - Napatree Point. Meet at Watch Hill parking lot.
8:00 A. M.
- April 25 - Barn Island. Meet at State Boat Landing Ramp.
8:00 A. M.
- April 30 to May 2 - Pocomoke City and the Delmarva Peninsula. Contact Sam Knox at 535-0554, not later than April 15, as motel reservations must be made.
- May 2 - Napatree Point. Meet at Watch Hill parking lot.
8:00 A. M.
- May 9 - "Big Day" (100 birds or bust) Arboretum.
6:00 A. M.
- May 16 - Arboretum and Mitchell Woods. Meet at the Arboretum. 7:00 A. M.
- May 22 - Kimball Wildlife Sanctuary. Meet at Watch Hill parking lot. 8:00 A. M.
- May 23 - Assekunk Swamp. Meet at Sam Knox's Darling Hill Farm, Stonington. 7:00 A. M.
- May 29 - Lake of Isles and Eastman's Farm. Meet at Howard Johnson parking lot, Route 95, Mystic Seaport Exit, 7:00 A. M.
- June 6 - Pachaug State Forest. Meet at Howard Johnson parking lot, Route 95, Mystic Seaport exit. 7:00 A. M.
- June 13 - Devil's Hopyard. Meet at New London Shopping Center. 7:00 A. M.

We Need Your Active Membership and Support

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

GALLOWS LANE, NEW LONDON, CONN. 06320

Phone: 443-4295

Annual dues: 12 months from _____

Name

Street City

Phone Zip Code

CLASSES OF MEMBERSHIP

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annual \$7 (each adult member of family) | <input type="checkbox"/> Friend of the Center \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$12 | <input type="checkbox"/> Organization \$15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Junior (under 16) \$4 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A special gift toward support of the Science Center effort is included \$ _____ | |

*Please make checks payable to The Thames Science Center
Contributions are tax deductible*

ACTIVITIES FOR APRIL

Saturday, April 3...10:00 A.M. Meeting of Junior Curators. All junior and senior high school students who wish to participate in this program are welcome to attend.

Sunday, April 4...3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film, "New Zealand Spring," presented by Dr. Olin Sewall Pettengill, Jr. Palmer Auditorium, Connecticut College. Tickets available at the door.

Week of April 5-9...7:00 P.M. Field Trip to observe the spectacular performance of the courting male woodcock. The exact date is pending weather conditions. Interested persons call the Science Center for further information.

Saturday, April 10...10:00 A.M. Junior Members Workshop for Grades 4, 5 and 6. "Looking for Amphibians." Meet at the Science Center. Limit 15 children. Registration required.

Saturday, April 17...10:00 A.M. Junior Members Workshop for Grades 1, 2 and 3. "Beachcombing Along the Shore." Meet at Harkness parking lot. Limit 15 children. Registration required.

Saturday, April 24...10:00 A.M. Outing Club and Junior Curators interested in trail work will meet to cut a new nature trail around the Science Center. If you have the appropriate tools, please bring them along together with a lunch. Beverages will be served.

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

Published by the
THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

Gallows Lane
New London, Connecticut 06320
Copyright © 1971

ROBERT S. TREAT - Exec. Director
MARTHA M. CAPIZZANO - Curator
ROBERT L. DYER - Naturalist
MARGO HIRSCHBERG - Librarian
STEPHAN B. SYZ - Assistant

The NATURALIST NOTEBOOK is published 10 times annually. Subscription available through membership only.

The Thames Science Center is a nonprofit organization seeking a quality environment through education.

The active support of children and adults in the Science Center, its programs, activities and efforts is earnestly solicited.

MARTHA M. CAPIZZANO
Editor

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Quaker Hill, Ct.
Permit No. 9

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER
GALLOWS LANE
New London, Connecticut 06320

PALMER LIBRARY
CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
NEW LONDON, CONN. 06320

RETURN REQUESTED



'Snowshoeing in the White Mountains'

Photo by S. Syz